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Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore Alumni (BPCA) E-Bulletin

Sep - Dec 2025

In this issue, embark on a journey of inspiration and discovery as we present a collection of meaningful highlights:

- **Yogyakarta Tour**
  Explore the grandeur of the Sailendra Dynasty, including the magnificent Borobudur, and visit STIAB Smaratungga, a Buddhist University, along with other enriching activities.

- **Buddhist Pāli Name Presentation Ceremony**
  A milestone signifying Buddhist lay followers' spiritual aspiration.

- **A Journey of Inner Transformation**
  An uplifting personal sharing on spiritual search and transformation.

We are also delighted to unveil the refreshed **Diploma in Buddhism** course, launching in January 2026. Explore its enhanced curriculum and dynamic new learning approach.

If you or your fellow BPC alumni would like to share your story or contribute an article, we welcome your submissions! Please contact Sister Tyy Yn at tyyynquek@gmail.com.

May all be well, happy and peaceful!

The Editorial Team
BPCA Alumni Committee
30 Jalan Eunos, Singapore 419495

The Soul of Java:
A Travel Log from Yogyakarta

22-26 August 2025

By Brother Chris Tran

Photos: Tour members and Sis Judith (Ik Chin Travel)

Day 1: Arrival and Ancient Whispers

Buddhist and Pali College Alumni, Singapore
22 AUG 2025 - 27 AUG 2025
bonding trip to Borobudur
Spiritual Advisor:
Bhante Seelananda,
Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple

Our journey began in the quiet, pre-dawn hours of Singapore at Changi Airport Terminal 1. Bleary-eyed but buzzing with anticipation, our group gathered at 5:45 AM, a familiar ritual for any traveller chasing an early flight. The short hop on TR206 was smooth, and before we knew it, we were descending into a new chapter of adventure.

We landed at the Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA), a stunningly modern gateway that rises from the landscape next to the shores of the Indian Ocean. Our guide informed us that this impressive facility, opened just a few years ago, fully replaced the old Adisucipto Airport during the COVID era, signalling a new age for tourism in the region.

After a swift transfer, we enjoyed a delightful welcome lunch at the Swiss-Belhotel Yogyakarta Airport. This first taste of Jogja's culinary delights promised the sumptuous feasts to come.

Belly full and spirits high, we drove northwest to Magelang. The urban sprawl of Yogyakarta gradually gave way to lush green fields and hazy outlines of mountains, setting the perfect scene for our historical exploration.

Our first official stop was **Pawon Temple** (Candi Pawon). Though small, its significance is immense. Its name derives from the Javanese word *awu* (dust), suggesting it may have functioned as a royal tomb or a "kitchen" for the soul - a place where offerings were prepared for the journey to the afterlife.

Wikipedia

Built in the 8th - 9th century during the Sailendra Dynasty, it forms part of a sacred alignment with Mendut and Borobudur temples.

Though the inner chamber is empty, the exterior walls are adorned with intricate carvings: images of Bodhisattvas, the goddess Tara, and the sacred Tree of Life, all whispering stories of a profound spiritual past.

Tree of Life

A short drive brought us to **Mendut Temple**, the second node in the sacred triad. Larger than Pawon, it houses some of Indonesia's most magnificent Buddha statues. Unfortunately, the main chamber was under reconstruction, so we could not view the renowned triad of statues within. Still, the temple's massive base was itself an open storybook, richly adorned with intricate carvings of ancient Buddhist Jataka tales and local fables.

Nearby, a colossal banyan tree captivated us with its aerial roots forming a natural cathedral.

We then strolled through **Mendut Buddhist Monastery,** a serene haven dotted with Buddha statues gifted by nations such as Japan, Thailand and Cambodia - standing like a silent international congregation. Its centrepiece was a large, graceful stupa said to house a sacred relic of the Buddha. The atmosphere was one of deep tranquillity, a perfect end to our temple introductions.

Mendut Buddhist Monastery

That evening, we checked in at the Hotel Doman Borobudur, nestled tantalisingly close to the famed Borobudur temple. Although just next door, the temple sits within a vast, gated archaeological park, hidden from casual view - building the anticipation for our sunrise visit tomorrow. Venturing out, we found a local night market buzzing with activity. This was a truly authentic experience, catering to locals with food, household goods, and daily necessities rather than tourist souvenirs—a refreshing glimpse into everyday life in Magelang.

Day 2: From Buddhist Serenity to Hindu Grandeur

The 4:00 AM alarm was a struggle, but utterly worth it. We were driven to **Dagi Abhinaya viewpoint** in pitch darkness. As the sky lightened from indigo to soft pink, the silhouette of Borobudur emerged from the mist in the valley below. Watching the sun crest the horizon and illuminate the world's largest Buddhist temple was pure magic. A picnic breakfast as the world woke up felt like a privileged secret.

We were driven the short distance to the legendary **Borobudur Temple Compound**. Unlike the quiet intimacy of Mendut and Pawon, the scale here was immediately awe-inspiring. This is not just a temple; it is a man-made mountain of stone, a cosmic diagram of the Buddhist universe, and the single greatest Buddhist monument on earth. Before ascending, we change into special slippers provided to protect the ancient volcanic stone – a thoughtful conservation effort.

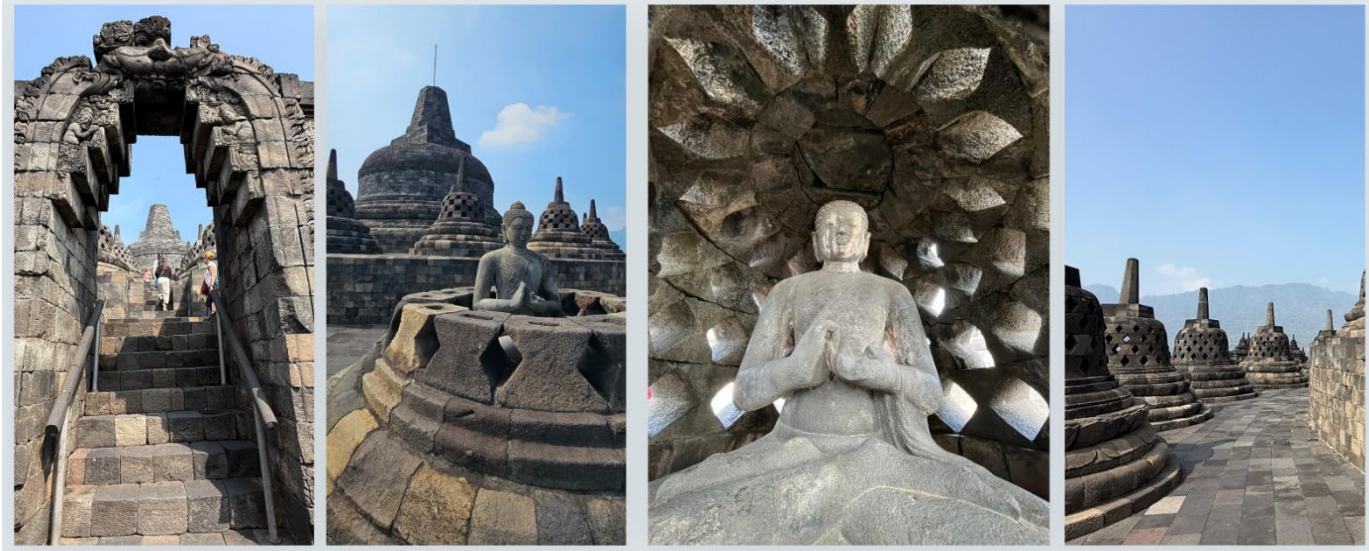
Our guide recounted Borobudur's story. Built in the 9th century during the reign of the Sailendra Dynasty, Borobudur was abandoned for centuries, shrouded by jungle and layers of volcanic ash from the Mount Merapi nearby. It was Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles who was alerted to its existence and began the process of rediscovery in 1814. Major restoration projects, most notably by the Indonesian government and UNESCO between 1975 and 1982, saved the monument from collapse. This history of conservation was visible in the very stones beneath our feet; with darker and lighter patches marking repairs across eras.

We began our climb. The journey to the top is a physical and symbolic pilgrimage through the three realms of Buddhist cosmology:

1. **Kamadhatu (The World of Desire)**: The massive hidden base, originally covered, depicts the world of passion and the law of karma.

2. **Rupadhatu (The World of Forms)**: The five square terraces are adorned with 2,672 intricate relief panels and 504 Buddha statues seated in niches. Each terrace tells a different tale, from the Buddha's previous lives, his path to enlightenment, as well as the Gandavyuha story. The reliefs are an endless, captivating narrative carved in stone.

3. **Arupadhatu (The World of Formlessness)**: Finally, we emerged onto the three circular platforms. Here, the solid walls give way to 72 perforated stupas, each housing a statue of the Buddha sitting within a stone latticework. The sense of space, light, and openness was profound, a physical manifestation of achieving Nirvana.



At the summit, a grand central stupa stands empty, symbolizing enlightenment beyond form. The culmination of our visit was deeply moving. Together with Bhante Seelananda, we performed a short ritual – a moment of gratitude not just to the Buddha, but to the countless architects, artisans,

and labourers who erected and preserved this monument. It transformed the visit from a tourist excursion into a genuine pilgrimage.

Our guide pointed out another fascinating detail: the Buddha statues in each cardinal direction are depicted with different mudras (hand gestures). The Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya (East) touches the earth; Ratnasambhava (South) grants wishes; Amitabha (West) is in meditation; and Amoghasiddhi (North) offers protection. These distinct gestures may have served as a spiritual compass for pilgrims of old.

We enjoyed a well-earned and delicious lunch at a restaurant within the temple complex before embarking on a journey eastward, to the realm of the Hindu gods at the stunning **Prambanan Temple** Complex.

Our guide explained that this 9th century marvel was built around the same time as Borobudur, making Central Java a breathtaking crucible of two great ancient faiths. Where Borobudur is vast and horizontal, Prambanan soars. Its skyline is dominated by sharp, jagged peaks called *shikharas*, designed to resemble the sacred Mount Meru. The central temple of Shiva, flanked by Candi Vishnu to the north and Candi Brahma to the south, inspired awe with its sheer height and artistry.

Riding on electric buggies within the same vast archaeological park, we arrived at a site that perfectly encapsulates the unique religious harmony of ancient Java: **Sewu Temple**, meaning "a thousand temples." The complex is a sprawling maze of Buddhist shrines. Its architecture is distinctly different from Prambanan's. Instead of towering spires, Sewu features a central temple surrounded by concentric squares of smaller, guardian shrines, many still crowned with the distinct Buddhist stupas.

Dinner was held at the stunning Abhayagiri Restaurant. The name itself, meaning "Fearless Mountain," felt like a poetic echo of the monumental sites we had just visited. Fully satiated, we proceeded to our home for the next few nights: the Novotel Suites Yogyakarta Malioboro - right in the middle of the city.

Day 3: Royalty and the Ring of Fire

Our third day offered a fascinating shift from ancient kingdoms to a living one, starting with the **Yogyakarta Royal Palace**. This isn't merely a historical relic; it remains the cultural heart of the city and the active residence of the Sultan.

We were greeted at the entrance by a magnificent, colourful image of Kala, the god of time, with wide mouth and fierce eyes - a distinctive Javanese motif we had grown familiar with at the temples. Here, it served as a guardian, a symbolic protector of the palace's sacred grounds.

Inside, elegant pavilions and serene courtyards unfolded like the pages of a living history book. The displays were captivating: collections of royal regalia, antique carriages, and exhibits detailing the Javan way of life and the region's complex history throughout the colonial era. The highlight was a traditional Javanese dance performance. Dancers, adorned in exquisite batik and gold, moved with an almost supernatural slowness and precision. Every flick of the wrist and tilt of the head was imbued with meaning, a hypnotic display of discipline and grace that told stories from the ancient epics.

In the afternoon, the mood shifted dramatically as we journeyed north to **Mount Merapi**, the "Mountain of Fire." Our rugged, open-sided jeep, set the tone for the rough terrain ahead.

A museum stop revealed chilling remnants of the 2010 eruption – melted televisions, twisted bicycles and stark photographs of devastation. It was a haunting reminder of the disaster that claimed hundreds of lives and buried entire villages.

Outside, we saw a bizarre relic of the eruption: a fascinating chunk of solidified lava that had cooled into a shape uncannily resembling an alien head. We also visited an abandoned bunker once meant as a refuge from

pyroclastic flows. Standing inside the dark, confined space was a chilling experience. Our driver pointed towards the peak of Merapi, but a cloak of clouds stubbornly hid the summit from view. Not being able to see the source of such power made it feel even more mysterious and ominous.

Dinner at Le Margaux Brasserie, a French restaurant serving local vegetarian dishes accompanied by live music offered an elegant close to the day.

Day 4: Academia and Architectural Fusion

Our day began with a profoundly meaningful visit to the **Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Agama Buddha (STIAB) Smaratungga**, a Buddhist university nestled in the foothills of Mount Merbabu, Yogyakarta's other majestic volcano. We were there to deliver refurbished laptops and $8,000 to be used as STIAB scholarships on behalf of the Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore Alumni Committee and alumni members and participants of this tour. Besides, we also brought along $1,000 donation, medicine, refurbished laptops and snacks for the Pasastrian Buddhis Kusalamitra which runs an orphanage. Due to our tight tour schedule, STIAB would assist us to hand over our donations to the orphanage.

To our immense surprise and honor, we were welcomed not with a simple greeting, but with a full morning of vibrant cultural performances. Despite being in their holiday period, the students had prepared a beautiful programme of traditional music and dance, a testament to their incredible warmth and generosity.

Some of the performances by students of the Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Agama Buddha (STIAB) Smaratungga

We learned of the special long-standing partnership between STIAB, our Buddhist and Pali College, and Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple back home. The morning concluded with a feast of vegetarian Javanese dishes, deepening the sense of community and spiritual friendship.

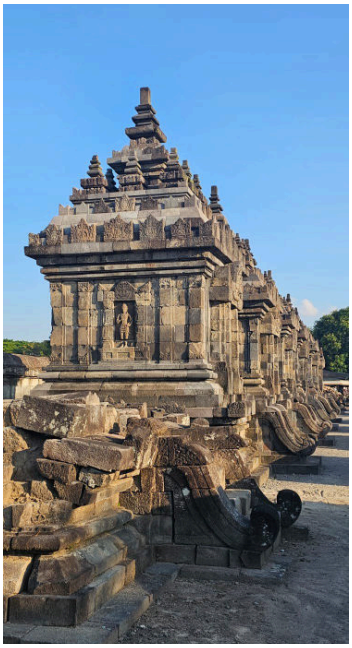
We felt our connection to this community grow even stronger when the principal, Venerable Dr. Kabri, extended a personal invitation to his temple, the **Girisasono Semedhi Meditation Centre**. We drove higher into the foothills of Mount Merbabu, leaving the bustle of the city further behind with each turn.

The centre itself was a haven of profound peace. Perched on the mountainside, it was clear this was not a temple built for tourists, but a dedicated space for deep spiritual practice. The architecture was simple, elegant, and perfectly integrated into the natural surroundings. The main meditation hall, with its sweeping views over the lush valleys below, offered a breathtaking vista that naturally quieted the mind. The only sounds were the gentle wind rustling through the trees and the distant chorus of nature. It was the perfect, secluded sanctuary for the practice of mindfulness, a fittingly serene conclusion to our visit of joyful and generous connection.

Girisasono Semedhi Meditation Centre

In the afternoon, we visited the twin temples of **Candi Plaosan Lor**. The identical temples are made up of an upper and lower level, separated into three rooms with distinctive square windows visible from the outside. On the lower level, multiple statues resided. The local guide pointed out the statue of Avalokitesvara in the main hall, identified by the figure of a small Buddha (Amitabha) depicted in his headdress, and Vajrapani on the side hall. On the upper walls of each room, there are traces of stone indentions that once supported wooden beams and wooden floors, creating upper rooms. There are also traces of stones at the base for wooden stairs.

Candi Plaosan Lor



We ended the day purchasing beautifully crafted Javanese batik shirts, carrying home not just souvenirs, but wearable pieces of the island's rich artistic heritage.

Day 5: Ocean Vistas and Beach Adventures

To complete our temple tour, we visited **Sambisari Temple**, which felt like an archaeological discovery.

Unlike the others, it was buried for centuries and now sits several meters below ground level. The presence of lingga and yoni stones within the main chamber underscores this focus on Shiva, symbolizing fertility and cosmic unity. Its compact, well-preserved structure and the statues of Durga and Ganesha in their niches felt like a hidden gem. According to museum records, a bronze statue of Bodhisattva Vajrapani was also found during excavation.

We left the ancient temples behind for the coast. **Obelix Sea View** lived up to its name—a stunning cliff-top viewpoint overlooking the vast Indian Ocean. The breeze was a welcome change from the inland heat.

The afternoon brought pure exhilaration: a Jeep tour at **Parangtritis Beach**. Racing across black sands, skimming the waves, and exploring dramatic dunes gave us an unforgettable taste of Java's coastal power and beauty.

Day 6: Until Next Time, Jogja

After a final breakfast at the airport hotel, we prepared to depart. This journey has woven together spirituality, history, natural wonder, and warm cultural encounters into a tapestry of unforgettable experiences. Until next time, Jogja.

Buddhist Pāli Name Presentation Ceremony

12 Oct 2025

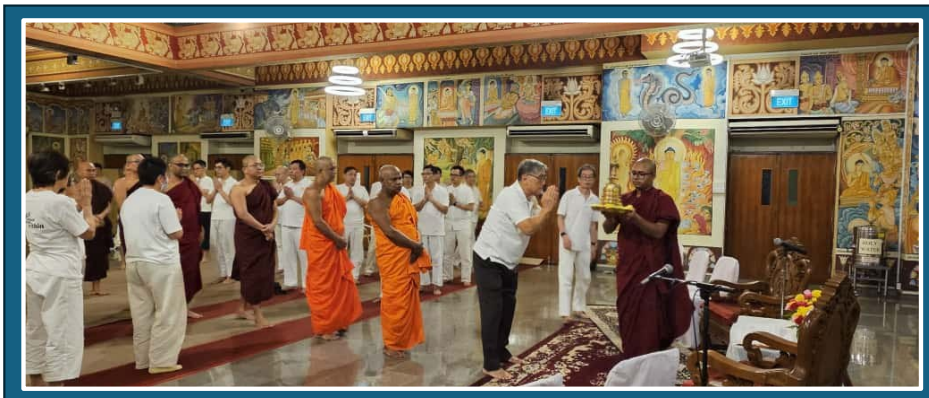
After the evening p*ūjā* on the day of the *Kaṭhina* ceremony at Mangala Vihara, the Buddhist Pāli Name Presentation Ceremony was held.

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Tree Park. Then Mahānāma the Sakyan approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:

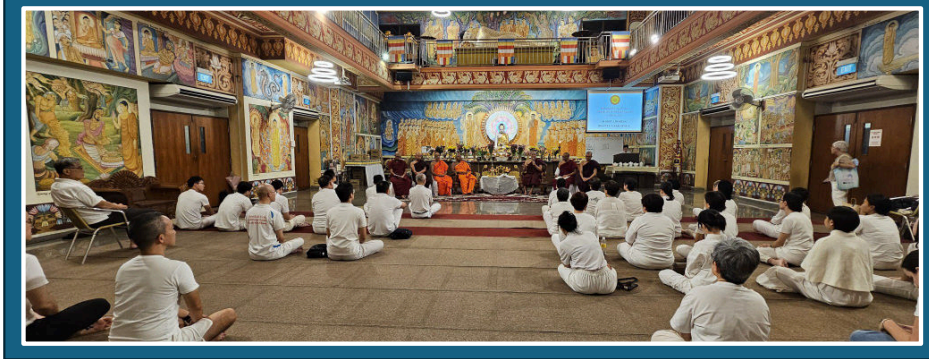
"In what way, Bhante, is one a lay follower?"

"When, Mahānāma, one has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, in that way one is a lay follower."

Mahānāma Sutta, AN 8.25



Blessings from the Buddha's relics



Address by Ven Cakkapala

1. Receiving the blessing

3. Receiving the certificate

2. Receiving the Pali name and its meaning

Chatta Manava Gatha – The Triple Gem
Yattha ca dinna mahapphala Māhu
Where the gift given reaps great benefit as they say. To the four pairs of purest beings, and to the eight types of people who see the truth clearly. This community is my refuge.

29 devotees participated in this ceremony, including 9 BPC students and at least 2 alumni members.

"Taking refuge in the Triple Gem is only the first step. May all of you continue to put the Dhamma into practice and do your part to help propagate the Dhamma for the benefits of more people!"

Ven. P. Seelananda
Chief Resident Monk,
Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple)

From Catholic Roots to the Buddhist Path:
A Journey of Inner Transformation

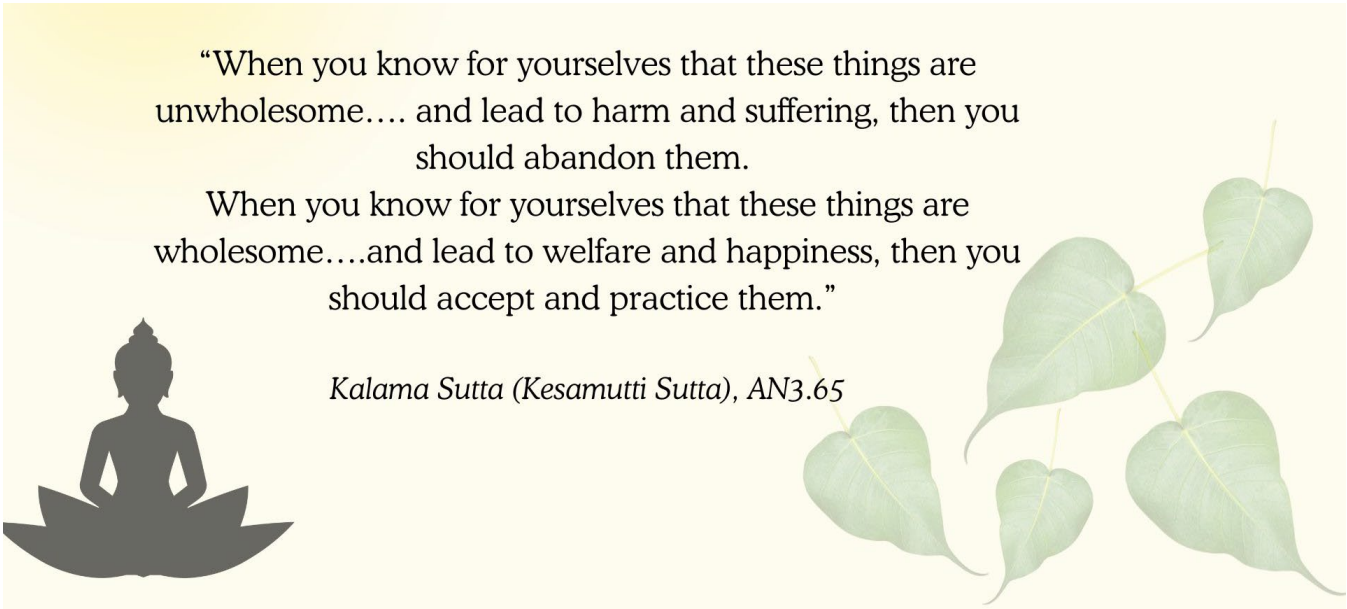
By Sis Uttamā Mila Marteja Chiong

I was born into a loving Catholic family in Philippines, where Sunday masses, prayer before meals and teachings about love, kindness and forgiveness shaped my early spiritual foundation.

The Catholic Church was my first school of faith and I am grateful for the values and sense of community it instilled in me. However, as I grew older, I began to ask deeper questions about suffering, the nature of the mind and the meaning of life. While Catholicism had offered me comfort and guidance in many ways, I find myself seeking a path that invited personal inquiry rather than unquestioned belief.

It was during this period of spiritual searching that I came across the *Kālāma Sutta*, a discourse by the Buddha. It changed the way I viewed faith and truth.

In this sutta, the Buddha spoke to the *Kālāmas*, who were confused by the many teachers and doctrines around them. He advised them not to accept teachings simply because they were handed down by tradition, taught by authority, written in scripture or widely believed. Instead, he said:


"When you know for yourselves that these things are unwholesome…. and lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them.
When you know for yourselves that these things are wholesome….and lead to welfare and happiness, then you should accept and practice them."
Kalama Sutta (Kesamutti Sutta), AN3.65

This was an awakening and powerful moment for me. For the first time a spiritual teaching gave me full permission to question and to reflect.

The *Kālāma Sutta* encouraged me to take responsibility for my own journey - not to follow blindly but to walk the path with awareness, discernment and integrity. It was this spirit of inquiry, that drew me deeper into the Dhamma. The Buddha's teachings were not about belief for its own sake but about understanding the nature of suffering and cultivating wisdom, compassion and mindfulness.

Through meditation, study and mindful living, I began to experience positive changes in how I related to myself and the world around me.

My decision to become a Buddhist was not a rejection of my Catholic roots but a natural revolution of my spiritual path. I still carry gratitude for the values I grew up with, but I have found Buddhism a way of living that aligns more deeply with my inner truth.

Today, as I continue to walk the Buddha's path, I do so with humility and openness. The *Kālāma Sutta* remains close to my heart - a reminder to stay grounded, to investigate and to walk the path not because I was told to, but because I have seen its fruits in my own life.

May all be well, happy and content.

Sis Uttamā at the Buddhist Pali Name Presentation Ceremony, organised by Mangala Vihara, on 12 Oct 2025

About the Refreshed Diploma in Buddhism Course

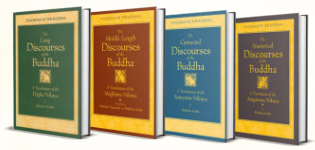
The “Diploma in Buddhism” course has been newly refreshed for the January 2026 intake. The revamped curriculum features a new subject, *Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling*, and a dynamic learning format that blends lectures, assignments, and experiential activities such as meditation sessions, case studies, role play, and field trips. Course evaluation will now comprise (a) examinations (70%) and (b) written assignments, participation in class activities, and attendance (30%), ensuring a holistic and practice-oriented learning experience.

Here are some highlights:

1. Early Buddhism – Fundamental Teachings

Objective:

- To explore fundamental teachings of Buddhism according to Pāli Nikāyas.



Key Topics Include:

- The Four Noble Truths
- The Three Characteristics of Existence
- The Five Aggregates
- Dependent Origination
- Kamma & Rebirth
- Nibbāna
- Buddhist Ethics

Experiential Learning:

- **Meditation Theory and practical sessions**
  - Concentration (*samatha*)
  - Insight (*vipassanā*)

2. Buddhist Social Dimensions

Objective:

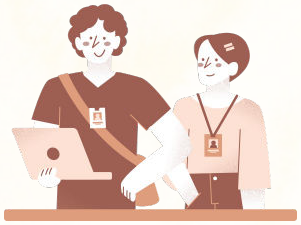
- To explore the sociological principles in Buddhist teachings and their relevance to contemporary society.

Key Topics Include:

- Social Relationships
- Roles of the Government
- Wealth Management
- Environmental Sustainability
- Gender Equality

Experiential Learning:

- Class discussions
- Project/fieldwork



3. Geographical Expansion of Buddhism

Objective:

- To explore the inception and spread of Theravāda Buddhism in South and South-East Asia.

Key Topics Include:

- Origin of Buddhism
- Spread & Decline of Buddhism in India
- Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos & Singapore

Experiential Learning:

- Field Study on Buddhism in Singapore

4. Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling

Objectives:

- To explore the mechanisms of the mind through the lens of Buddhist teachings.
- To explore the application of Buddhist principles and practices effectively within a counselling context.

Key Topics Include:

- Buddhist understanding of mind, suffering, feeling, personality and liberation.
- Buddhist approaches to therapeutic relationship, micro skills, conceptualisation and intervention.

Experiential Learning:

- Case Studies
- Role Play

5. Pāli Language and Literature

Objective:

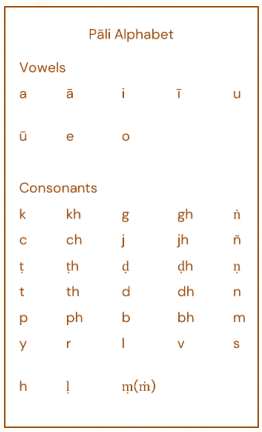
- To have an appreciation of Pāli language and Pāli literature.

Key Topics Include:

- Introduction to Pāli grammar
- Reading Suttas

Experiential Learning:

- Engagement in Pūjā



School Calendar

Class Commencement Date:	
New Diploma Class@Mangala Vihara (MV):	04 January 2026 @ 2.00pm
New Diploma Class@Poh Ming Tse (PMT):	06 January 2026 @ 7.30pm
New Diploma Class in **Chinese:**	04 January 2026
Degree Classes:	04 January 2026
MA Class:	04 January 2026 @ 4.00pm
Holidays:	
Chinese New Year (17 *to 18 Feb 2026*):	12 to 25 February 2026
Vesak Day (*31 May 2026*):	26 May to 6 June 2026
National Day:	9 August 2026
Study Leave/Combined Revision:	
Diploma *Combined Revision* (English):	1 November 2026 (tbc)
Diploma *Study Leave* (English & Chinese):	3 November 2026
Degree *Study Leave*:	18 October 2026
Examination (*to be confirmed*):	
Diploma (English & Chinese):	5 to 7 December 2026 (tbc)
Degree:	1st two weeks of December 2026
Events:	
Chinese New Year Tea-Party:	1 March 2026
Diploma Class Temple Visit:	xx xxx 2026 (tbc)*
Chinese Diploma Class Temple Visit:	xx xxx 2026 (tbc)*
Teachers' Workshop:	3 to 5 April 2026
Founders' Memorial Day:	7 June 2026 (tbc)
Graduation Day: (for 2024, 2025 graduates)	13 September 2026 (tbc)
Spring Cleaning Day:	27 December 2026 (tbc)

*Dates are subject to change. *Depending on Class Activities Schedule*

Tentative Calendar: 26 October 2025